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Castle & Knight & Troubadour

In an apology and Three Tableaux

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CASTLE KNIGHT AND TROUBADOUR

In an Apology and Three Tableaux

I then saw," says Gerard de Nerval, speaking of a certain besettment of ideas of his own, "vaguely drifting into form, plastic images of antiquity which outlined themselves, became definite, and seemed to represent symbols of which I seized the idea with difficulty only." I make his words my own, for I also have been haunted by the symbols of things, which have shaped themselves and materialized into living forms, as I read of that resurgent time which awoke Italy from the grief of Rome's decay, brought joy to childlike France, moved rude Germany to thought and song, and stirred in barbarous England the germ of art.

I should have been pleased had these curious, grave, gay, comic, false, aspiring, essentially youthful creatures of my

fancy's acquaintance consented to dwell in Italy, for that seemeth a fair country, and it is, moreover, the one that taught men how to think after their long forgetting. But my creatures are chivalrous, and Italy was not the home of chivalry. They are sincere and credulous, and Italy was wise with an ancient wisdom and scoffed. I was therefore constrained, whether I would or not, to leave a place so intellectual, so discriminating, so well adapted to enduring achievement, and walk with my insouciant folk to the very careless land of Provence. There are orchards blooming, — "the gentle country all abloom with fresh grass" — and the brooding day solicits lovers, finders of song, amorous and aspiring women, men whose pride it is to die for the sepulchre, and all other foolish persons.

Nor will you forget, if you please, that I am not to touch upon the greater questions of this pregnant time. It is not for me to comment on the nature of the seed

that, germinating in the rich loam of the ages, came slowly to its spacious growth, till the branches of the tree of knowledge hung over all the Christian lands. Nor shall I speak of the rumor that this seed was dropped from pagan hands; nor yet discuss, whether, being grown, it proved a upas for Christianity. Nor am I to concern myself with the men of great and revolutionary ideas—with Petrarch, Dante, Boccaccio, Galileo, Lorenzo di Medici, Lionardo, Botticelli, Michael Angelo, Cœur de Leon, Villon, Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine, Margaret of Navarre, Bruno the philosopher, or that extravagant being, Bernini, who served as the drop curtain for the Renaissance. I do not write of the lucid and formulated time—that remains for others. My tale is of an incoherent, joyful day, a morn of dew, in which the world, a-wandering by pleasant paths, discovered song. Yet have no fears that the theme will cloy you with its sweetness, for if you listen you shall hear

a minor and fateful note — an under-harmony, presageful and of power. It is the Sorrow of Woman, making itself audible, swelling above the folly of the time, forcing men eventually to strife for liberty of thought. But this in a later hour than that of which I write. Now, behold, Dante has not yet taught the dignity of dialects, nor Aldus fashioned his presses. Carelessly, with toying hands, the learning of the Arabs has been gathered up, it is true, but as children gather pearls in the river bed, unheeding their value. And of all the curious, gay kaleidoscopic world, upon three fantastic pieces we must focus our eyes — the Castle, the Knight, and the Troubadour.

TABLEAU I.

The Troubadour.

THE ante-rooms of the great hall at Ventadorn were chill and dusky. Through little windows the light came in meagrely, falling with caution on the ill-kept floors. The walls were grey and bare, save for a Damascan scabbard here or a wrought cutlass there, or, in a niche, a distorted figure of the Crucified, carved in black wood. Bones that had been flung from the table or left by the dogs, a dead rat, the stones and peelings of fruit, lay about under foot, annoying no one.

In one of these rooms, where there was no provision for fire, where the perfume of blossoming orchards came in miserly puffs of sweetness and the sunlight spread itself fan-like through the bars at the window, sat four men about a table. They were drinking from cups of polished buf-

falo horn and talking with unctuous good fellowship.

One was a man of middle age, grave of port, with a hint of the warrior in his bearing; as indeed he had a right to have, for it was not a month since William of Poitiers had returned from the conquest of Jerusalem, whither he had gone with Raymond of Toulouse. The other men were as gay as grasshoppers in July.

"By His Wounds, Bernard," cried one, "but I swore I should pay a pilgrimage to thy shrine if I never took another journey in my life. I had, if you will believe me, encouragement from our lady. She vowed that if she had a finder in her hall like thee, she could with more grace assert Normandy to be the regnant Court of Love. Any day, if thou art near her tower, thou mayest hear her singing by herself. And what? Not the famous songs of our great master," he bowed to William of Poitiers; "not the viralais of these errant beggars," and he saluted half mockingly his other

companions, "but thy songs, Bernard — thine!"

"Thou speakest of Eleanor, the Duchess of Normandy?" inquired William with respect.

"Of the peerless Lady of that jocund Court of Love," cried the first speaker, Peter of Auvergne. "Eleanor, whose white beauty — "

But Bernard of Ventadorn interrupted him:

"And which of my songs doth she sing?" he asked. His red-brown eyes had little points of flame in them. He leaned forward, breathing quickly, showing his white teeth, blushing with delighted vanity.

Peter smiled at him tantalizingly and did not at once answer.

"Come, come," pleaded Bernard. "Tell me, Peter! I have not deserved so much, my friends, but if joy beyond deserts comes to one — "

"Cease thy clamor," laughed Peter. "I

will, being a good-natured fool and free of envy, sing to thee that song of thine which she doth most affect."

He lifted his German lyre from the table, made an absurd feint of ladylike airs and sang in an exquisitely sweet but mocking falsetto this song:

"Behold, the meads are green again,
The orchard bloom is seen again,
Of sky and stream the mien again
Is mild, is bright;
Now should each heart that loves obtain
Its own delight.

"But I will say no ill of love,
However slight my guerdon prove;
Repining doth not me behoove;
And yet — to know
How lightly she I fain would move,
Might bliss bestow!

"There are those hold my fancy great,
Because with little hope I wait;
But one old saw doth animate
And me assure:
Their hearts are high, their might is great,
Who well endure."

William of Poitiers listened with the air of a critic, his strong, passionate, face

wearing a certain reserve; the maker of the poem, who now heard for the first time his own verses sung by a Troubadour of his own quality, was as flushed and joyful as a girl who hears the first love vow whispered in her ear. The third man, who had a dark and sensitive face — Raoul de Coucy, a bastard of noble birth, and a singer in Fate's despite—broke into impetuous applause.

"It is a pretty enough song," said William, stroking his beard and speaking rather caustically, "and I doubt not the white lady Eleanor can make it languishing as moonlight on the sea, but beggar me if 'twas writ for her! Eh, Bernard, confess thyself! These cries of longing were for one as fair, and much less prodigal of her rewards?"

Bernard, the baker's son, chief of the singers to Elbe III, Viscount of Ventadorn, lifted his horn filled and overflowing.

"It was writ for Adelaide of Venta-

dorn!" he shouted. And all his guests, arising, drank, while Bernard continued his eulogy: "Adelaide of Ventadorn, who I say hath the whitest hands, the most star-like eyes, the stateliest grace of any lady — I care not how born and I care not how loved — in all the land." And he launched into more intimate praise, till the men laughed deep in their throats and turned hot, avid eyes on each other. William of Poitiers, the king of evil jesters, spoke out with scurrilous wit. Peter of Auvergne chuckled endlessly, and clapped his fellow-singers on the backs. Only Raoul, the Bastard, having flushed with passion, flushed deeper with shame. He laid his hand heavily upon his breast and seemed to press something cruel into the flesh. The lust died out of his eyes, and the receding blood left him ghost-pale, with trembling lips.

Outside the air was balm, but between the heavy walls the chill of winter still lingered, and Raoul drew about his sen-

sitive body a cloak of yellow, weather-stained and fringed at the edges with much wear.

"What a monk thou art, Raoul," sneered Peter of Auvergne. "Hast thou no laughter in thee? By His Body, man, who art thou to turn away from a good full-bellied jest! Art thou so nice? It eases me to let out a little against these aristocrats! Why, man, we eat their crusts; we sleep in their dark corners, we come when they invite us and roam forth when they frown. We know what it is to draw up our belts for the ache of hunger, and also we know how it is to be stuffed as full as roasted geese. We who may not be lords, who can not remain peasants, who no matter what our wit or our learning must lick other men's shoes, may we not scoff a little? We may not consort on equal terms with women of like intellect with our own, and if we kiss, it must be in the shadow of the hawthorne betwixt twilight and dawn, and like as not, a poig-

nard for our pains. Ah, we plume ourselves, do we! Call ourselves finders, Troubadours, favorites! We are dogs, man — sorry dogs, picking up bones from the tables of the witless; shivering while they sit before the fire! If we have a talent for scoffing, by the Sephulchre, let us scoff!"

And he sang with insolent intonation a catch of William of Poitiers.

Raoul wore embroidered on his tattered sleeve the coat of arms of the house Coucy, though with the bar sinister, and it was now with the tolerant and arrogant contempt of the Counts of Coucy that he regarded the Troubadour.

"I find good among nobles as well as Troubadours, my impassioned Peter," Raoul said with a certain condescension. "As for my vocation, it is of my choosing, and I let others belittle it — I do it not myself, by the Mother of God! In kisses I do not indulge, my friend. I sing honorably to virtuous ladies."

His friends broke into a guffaw — and under the tattered cloak, de Coucy's hand flew to his sword.

"Messieurs!" he cried. There was battle in his eyes. William of Poitiers sniffed contemptuously. But the others, for all their bravado, felt the spirit of the unchallenged autocracy of the dominant class in this attitude, this ejaculation, this indefinable hauteur of the high-bred, mystical, moody face. Peter muttered something placating, and Bernard, as host, changed the conversation to pleasanter themes. He stood up straight and slim before his guests and waved them to their seats.

"Be comforted, good friends," he said. "Great honor have you done me, journeying for days to the castle of this my Lord, to listen to the singing of his minstrel. Now, before we are called to the Plaisance, where as is the custom, my Lady Adelaide, mistress of my soul, Countess of my Lord, Queen of our Court of Love,

doth welcome all comers and discuss the 'gai sience,' let me speak. You have come from other courts, to listen to the song-maker of Ventadorn. Very well, I shall sing my best for you. I shall extend to you, as my Lord permits me, the hospitality of our house. I shall present you to my mistress, and she shall commend your songs, and I say, and will maintain it, that she hath as goodly a taste in lais, verilais, rondels, ballades, gestes and Arabian rimes, quadruple and sextuple as any lady in all the land. Moreover I maintain that of all Lords there be none more kind than the Viscount of Ventadorn. And behold, I have not been a beggar in my time, nor hath any true poet been turned from these doors forth into the hedges. I was born in the bakehouse back yonder. I was — nay, I remain with all fidelity, — the son of a baker, a man of no estate and no consideration, but one who loves song and laughter. The little scullions played with me in my babyhood, and when I grew to

stripling's size I cleaned the pots, or fed the dogs, and only at night when none were by to watch dared I ereep out of the kitchen close and wander to the Plaisance to lie among the flowers or listen to the calling of night birds. Then behold one day, as it were an apple falling from a tree, a song fell into my lap. I cannot tell why 'twas, for I had no notion that I could sing. With wonderment I found my throat giving forth songs. All my words came in measures, riming, fit for music — such songs as no other finder yet had sung!"

The rival Troubadours made no comment. It was the custom of the finders to celebrate their prowess in song, even as the Crusaders told of their exploits and their victories.

Bernard resumed: "I nursed the secret in my heart and I made many songs and bided my time. And it came. For the Viscount brought home young Adelaide of Montpelier, his second bride, a lily with

a heart of gold, making joy yet feeling none, with tears like pearls, with prayers like incense, with a knowledge of things unknown to grosser souls, a creature already clad for presentation to the Lord of pure spirits. And the day she came forth in her bridal robes to welcome all who pay tribute unto the demesnes of Ventadorn and to receive the lords whose lands lie 'junct to ours, I crept in from the kitchen. The hall was all alight and wonderful. I saw the jewels flashing on the sword hilts of the nobles and on their necks. I saw the women glowing like the sunset, and in their midst, Adelaide like a pure white cloud. I beheld her beauty as it were a vision above the Sephulchre in the sacred city. I went forward in the press, all in my homespun, with my clipped hair and my baker's cap in my hand and knelt. I had no instrument; I hardly had a name. I knelt and waited. 'There is a youth kneeling to thee, my lord,' I heard my lady say. So, dimly, in

the confusion of my senses, I not knowing what might come next, some one lifted me, and I heard the Viscount bidding me state my case. Then I saw no one and there was a kind of splendor about me, as if lightning had filled the hall and had staid there, quivering, and I stood forth and lifted both my arms and cried: 'Behold, me Lord, I am a finder! I can sing songs. I pray you, for the glory of this house, let me sing!' And, since it is a tradition never to silence the voice of a singer beneath this roof, the Viscount gave permission and I sang. But curiously enough the song I meant to sing was gone from me, and I thought for a moment I was lost. Then gazing in the soft eyes of our Lady Dove, a new song came—a daring song. I looked at the grey beard of her husband — verily, she had not met him till the wedding day — and I met her shining-patient eyes, her golden hair, nay, nay, her thrice golden youth, and I sang — I know not what — for though

the rhymes came rushing from me like water from the gargoyles at the door, I forgot them, once they were done."

The Troubadours groaned in sympathy. Lost honor would have disturbed them little. A man dead, a maid disgraced — well, these were incidents. A man and a maid should have care for life and maidenheads. But a lost song! It moved them to pity.

"So," resumed Bernard, "I became the singer of Ventadorn, and I make songs to Beauty, to Spring, to Night!

The perfumes of April floated in the window, bringing with it a sound of women's laughter.

"Go, my little children, and curl your locks," cried Bernard, lifting his finger for them to note the laughter. "Our Court gathers. Hasten — the ladies will be waiting. As for thee, Raoul, if thou art inclined, thou shalt wear my new coat."

"I give thee thanks," said Raoul gent-

ly; "but my coat and I go together now even as we have for several years, in storm and in shine, at buryings and fetes."

"Presently they were pacing down the sunlit length of the Plaisance, where under a fringed canopy of Damascan silk sat a company of ladies and gentlemen, very gayly faired. Servants went in and out among the company bearing fruits and drinks, flowers wreathed the chairs in which the ladies sat, and in the blossoming trees about them sang the mating birds.

Little cries of delight broke from the ladies as the Troubadours approached. They fluttered their diaphanous scarfs, flung flowers at the minstrels, and were apparently enchanted at everything — the soldier-like bearing of William of Poitiers, the nonchalance of Peter of Auvergne and of Bernard of Ventadorn, and the haughty bearing of the ragged Raoul de Coucy. Bernard presented the guests to his lord and lady — not that William

required an introduction, for there were at this time few courts before which he had not appeared.

"My lady," cried Desirée Autafort, one of the youngest and most beautiful of the company, "I have a subject, an it please thee, fit for debate this propitious day which brings so many gallant singers to our court." She smiled upon the company with conscious coquetry.

"Pray thee, speak," smiled Adelaide in her slow way, flinging a white rose at the girl. Desirée caught it and held it in her long delicate fingers — fingers laden with the pale blue turquoises of the Arabians — and announced with much solemnity the subject she had to propose.

"Which," she said, "are the greater — the benefits or the ills of love?"

There was applause. Knights, ladies, greybeards, striplings, the waiting Troubadours, received the suggestion with profound respect. It was evident that here was theme for discourse.

"Who else deviseth for us a theme?" asked Adelaide courteously. Blanchefleur Vaquerias, the Spaniard, luscious and half-sullen, looked up from beneath meeting brows, and caught the eye of the lady.

"Speak, my little one," said Adelaide kindly.

"I have bethought me of a subject more intricate," acknowledged Blanchefleur, when she had saluted as maiden should a matron. "Listen, of thy courtesy." She lifted the tasselled wand she held in her hand — a pretty folly, hanging with silver rings and little tinkling bells: — "Which loveth the more deeply, one who can not keep from speaking to every one of his lady, or one who doth not speak of her at all yet thinketh of her night and day?"

The cries of approval were more pronounced.

"A diverting question," muttered the Viscount in his grey beard.

"Most suitable to the day," William

of Poitiers said to his fellow-singers.

"It is my choice," announced Adelaide in her resonant and calm voice. "And thou, Bernard, since day and night thou singest my praises, shalt do well to defend him, who, loving, speaketh his love. And thou Raoul de Coucy, who art pale and of a melancholy cast, as if thou knewest over well the silences and sorrows of love, shalt defend him who, in lonely places, in ruins and beside dark seas, and in leafless forests, and in night and rain, walketh thinking of his love and, warmed and fed by thought of her, feeling speech a superfluity. Thou, Peter of Auvergne, shalt do our singer here, our Bernard, the honor of sustaining him in his argument, and thou, William of Poitiers, for that thou art eldest and hast the most of celebrity, shalt stand with Raoul, least known and the youngest in years."

She lifted her hand, and the musicians burst into a jocund strain upon their pipes. Four little boys clad in scarlet and

gold appeared suddenly in the midst of the guests, and began flinging a shower of apple-blossoms among them.

The Troubadours stood waiting, William confident, Peter somewhat harrassed and on his mettle to show his worth, Bernard complacent under the caressing of Adelaide's eyes, Raoul distrait, his arms folded across his breast.

There came upon the scene at this moment, an ancient and eldrich dame, the blind Countess of Provence. A pair of buxom maidens, hearty as cabbages, supported her on each side; a rugged dwarf with an elfish smile carried her train of brocade. She walked slowly, lifting her dress high in front and betraying a pair of much embroidered slippers. About her neck swung a huge chain of yellowing pearls. She was seated with ceremony, and to her were brought the Troubadours, and the theme of their discourse for the day was made clear to her. She listened with her head bent forward

and her sightless eyes on the minstrels.

Then, since she was a great patroness of song, though blind and past the age of dalliance, she spoke to each of them of their findings, talked of the sirvente, the gest, the art of the jongleurs, the better adaptation of the tongue of the south against the tongue of the north to poetry, joy, and grace. Having become accustomed to their voices so that she could discern one from the other, she begged that she might touch their brows, and at that moment came over her a certain rigidity, such as falls upon cataleptic persons, so that she sat, corse-stiff, with vague, unwavering eyes, and spoke as one speaks who knows not what he says, yet utters words put into him from some power without. First came William of Poitiers, wary and disdainful.

"Thou, Master of Troubadours," she said, "shalt behold thy mastery go from thee, for even beside thee is one destined to be greater than thou. Thou who hast

fought in battles shall die in bed; thou who hast chronicled other men's lives shalt have none at hand in the day of thy death to mark the manner of thy going. Thou who hast scoffed shalt one day repent, and the fairest song of thy making shalt be the song of repentance."

William moved from beneath that mystic hand with aversion.

"A song of repentance!" he sneered, and cast a glance of midday love full on Blanchefleur.

Next knelt Peter of Auvergne, grinning foolishly.

"And thou shalt be beaten down in better men's quarrels as a cricket of the fields, piping at the moon, is drenched in bitter rain. Yet because of the sweetness of the piping, men shall long remember thee."

Peter, chidingly grateful, lifted the hem of the old autocrat's robe to his sensual lips. A poet's pride shone in his eyes.

Next came Raoul de Coucy, respectful

to the ancient dame.

"And thou, poor de Coucy, landless, the innocent shame of thy family, shalt find the poet's joy the only pay for thy expenditures. Thou, half lover, half poet, tormenting thyself secretly even now with penitential garments, thou who standest in the court of folly, shalt keep thy feet in the mud of earth and thine eyes on the stars of heaven. And into thy heart this day shall come a new joy and a fresh grief, for this is the day of thy destiny. And the time shalt come when thou afar, shalt write a threnody for her whom thou shalt love, she being dead." A chill wind seemed to strike her shrivelled body, and she shivered, then spoke again. "And thou shalt perish in a mad hour, amongst many men, dying like thyself, outside the walls of a beleaguered city, and in that dying think on one thou seest first today."

Raoul, believing, pale, his mystic eyes on those of the prophetess, lifted her hand to his lips — as being of her class, though

ragged and a wanderer, he had the grace to do.

Then moved he apart and stood gazing at the sad face of Adelaide as one stricken with a mortal love.

Last came Bernard of Ventadorn, nonchalant and affectionate — for had he not known the old prophetess since his babyhood?

"And thou, Bernard," she said: "thou, ardent yet changeful, a perfumed wind blowing now here, now there, a gorgeous butterfly feasting on the flowers of Ventadorn, art set aside for immortality. While men live on earth they shall sing thy songs when they are love-stricken. Thou shalt stir the blood of the sluggish, fan the fire of the glowing into flame. By moonlight and by sunlight, in meeting and in parting, lovers shall remember thee. But Bernard, the flowers that tempt thee today shall hold no sweet for thee to-morrow. Therefore sing on, and let us hear thy voice, that in less lyric hours we may

cherish memories of thy tunefulness."

The rigidity slipped from her as it had been a drenched garment. She flushed slowly with the pale glow of age, and moved her hands to play with that great rope of yellowing pearls.

"The argument! the argument!" cried all the people, and Adelaide, starting from a reverie, gave signal that the debate was to begin.

The day glowed on to its perfect hour. On the flowery slopes the pale gold sunlight brooded. The amorous birds solicited each other with melting songs.

Bernard of Ventadorn sang to his mistress, but with careless lips. She, out of deep eyes, regarded him as the astronomer regards the heavens, beholding mysteries. And Raoul de Coucy, in his rags, made a new song of delicate melancholy:

"I have learned how love can wound,
Grievously his dart I feel,
But how sweetly he can heal,
That I never yet have found.

"The physician well I know
Who alone can cure my pain,
But to me what is the gain,
If my wounds I dare not show?"

TABLEAU II.

The Knight.

EBLE III, Viscount of Ventadorn, sat in his hall on a certain day. Behind his chair of carved wood hung a tapestry depicting a boar hunt, and on the dais beneath his feet was the skin of leopards sewn in a mottled carpet. On his finger shone the signet ring; and at his elbow sate his clerk. Down each side of the grim hall, staves in hand and knives at belt, stood his stout men-at-arms, and by the dais, splendid in his trappings, was his Seneschal.

Long and pale was the face of Ventadorn, and the grey beard was scant. Florentine velvet, black as the Shades, clothed the tall form, and a chain of Venetian gold was hung about his neck.

To him came certain persons crying judgment — a woman who had been beaten by her husband; a man who had

been robbed of all his little wealth; a knight who had been deserted by a wanton wife.

To the woman who had been chastised Ventadorn gave laughing scorn. "A beating?" he roared! "I beat my first wife heartily and rejoice to remember it. Get home to thy master and do his bidding, and thank the good God that thou hast a husband who hath health to use a stick on thee."

The woman went weeping, but at the door she turned.

"I never gave my husband the cause to beat me that thy Lady Adelaide give thee," she whispered. Ventadorn heard —yet feigned not to hear, and there was brought before him the keeper of forests who had been robbed of his savings.

"How camest thou by savings?" he sneered.

"By going hungry, my lord, when others gorged; by going cold when others were clad; by sitting in darkness when

others had light and fire."

"And why didst thou do this thing?"

"Because I have a daughter now at the Convent of Mary, whom I would dower, for she is all I have, my lord, and a good girl, and I desire for her a husband."

"And who robbed thee?"

"My lord, I hold it to be the Captain of thy knights, who spoke to me the other day telling me my Lord of Toulouse required a tribute from vassal and freeman for his second expedition to the Holy Land."

"And gavest thou the tribute?"

"My lord, have mercy! I had only my little savings, to dower my child!"

"Their action hath my sanction, by His Wounds!" swore the Viscount. "What, shall Christian hounds grudge a pittance, while the Sepulchre of our Lord lies defiled in pagan hands? Shall thy betters suffer in saracen prisons, die in the snows of Alpine passes, faint on the scorching plains, rot on fever-cursed ships or perish

before the walls of Jerusalem, while thy baggage of a daughter is kept in luxury?"

The man cringed — nay crawled — then at the door stood erect and flamed wrath from his spiteful eyes. A hound, much noted for its ferocity, and sent from Germany to Provence, caught the contagion of the man's anger and bit at his leg. The man seized this vent for his rage lightning-quick — drew a knife, severed the brute's throat, and stood waiting with a certain foolish exultation in his eyes.

"Bind that man," commanded Ventadorn. "Teach him the smell of a dungeon. He hath had too much fresh air!"

To the husband who came complaining that his wife had left him in wantonness, Ventadorn gave greeting.

"Bring wine," he called, and it being brought, he filled two vessels.

"Let us drink," he said. And when they had finished he asked:

"Friend, dost thou like this wine?"

"It is excellent," said the man and tip-

ped his horn again lest an unquaffed drop should remain.

"Since thou likest it," said the Viscount, "I shall send thee a cask. When that is gone let me know and I will send thee more. It is better than many wives."

The man looked straight in the eyes of Ventadorn, and understood.

"He knows," thought the man. "He understands. I was indeed foolish to come. These are affairs to which a man ought to attend himself." And he went home to devise how he should slay his rival.

Then Ventadorn sent away his clerk, and dismissed his men-at-arms, and to his Seneschal he said:

"Bring the Troubadour!"

So there appeared before him presently Bernard the Troubadour, his arms bound, his garments and his flesh nasty with the filth of a dungeon.

"Cut his bonds," said Ventadorn. And they were cut.

"Now leave us," said the Lord to the Seneschal, and they were left.

Ventadorn came down out of his high seat and stood before the minstrel.

"Bernard of Ventadorn," said he, "thou art a knave!"

The Troubadour drew his breath in through his teeth with a sharp sound and ventured nothing.

"Bernard, son of my baker, my sometime pot-boy, this is the hour of our reckoning!"

"My Lord," retorted he, "As thou sayest!"

"Bernard, did I not because of thy genius lift thee up to a high place, cause my chaplain to teach thee, make thy glory a part of the glory of the house?"

Bernard smiled.

"If thou choose to put it so, my Lord, it is so."

The Viscount came nearer to the minstrel. His old eyes narrowed, and a cruel smile flickered around his thin lips.

"Bernard," said he, "dost know a tree out yonder in the orchard which beareth red blossoms, but never reacheth fruit?"

"I know such a tree," said the Troubadour.

"It is called the Judas tree, Bernard."

"Even so, my lord."

"On it hanged one who betrayed his Master."

The Troubadour's nostrils quivered like those of a frightened horse; there was a curious twitching about the loose flesh on his brow; blotches of red appeared on his face and disappeared as sudden as they came.

"Wert thou of fitting birth, Bernard, I should fight thee, and one of us would die."

The Troubadour's knees were giving a little. He was, after all, the son of a baker. Courage was not in his traditions.

"Or were I as some, I should hang thee like an over-ripe apple from the limb of that same fruitless tree — the second of

thy kind to find justice on it. This, indeed, did I debate with myself. Yet, because it would bring disagreeable thoughts to my mind, and because I know myself punished in thee for my folly in elevating one of thy kind to honor, I do no more than send thee forth. Get thee gone, Bernard, traitor and troubadour, and get thee far! A horse shall be given thee — my last gift of many. Let me see thee nevermore!"

He struck upon the floor with his staff, and there appeared the men-at-arms and bore the Troubadour away. Then came a little later pale Adelaide creeping along the hall, and found the old man huddled in a seat, his eyes sunken, his cheeks colorless.

"My lord" — she said, hesitatingly.

He leaped up and pointed an accusing finger at her. She smiled and held up her head, shaming him with clear gaze, beating down his scorn with her deeper scorn. Then, wavering, he all but fell, and she,

calling others to his assistance, saw him borne away. She stood for a time, like a woman of stone in the midst of the vast, dim hall. Perhaps she reviewed all that has passed there. She roused herself and looked around. Gaunt shadows seemed to move in the recesses. The arras swayed slowly. From the court came the sound of hoofs. Some one was departing in haste. Adelaide leaned against a pillar heavily, her hands clasped together and hanging down before her.

The hoofs clanged loud on the stone, grew faint, then fainter, grew ghostly, ceased!

Another sound arose. It was some one singing in a far chamber. Unto her sick soul floated in the words:

"O sweet, my soul, whate'er they say,
There is no grief like ours to-day,
When friend from friend is rent away.
Alas, I know too well," said he,
"How brief one happy night may be.
Ah ha!
I hear the sentry's call afar;
Up and away!
Behold the day
Comes following the day-star."

TABLEAU III.

The Castle.

THE spring had gone — that spring and others. Now, bleakly, out of the North, blew the rain-smitten wind. It beat on Adelaide's tower with ghostly importunity. It whispered secrets of the castle — old crimes committed in those ancient rooms — old joys, dead as the sorrows. Whispered the secrets? Nay, it shrieked them in a wierd antiphony — secrets of the dungeons, of the chambers, of the long, dark, dank passages, of the battlements, of the sheer escarpment — the Rhone rolled beneath — of the towers, of the long refectory, of the rooms where the servants cluttered, the rooms where the knights drank to soddenness; the rooms where babes were born, the rooms where women died!

There was one dying there now. It was Adelaide, sometime Queen of the

Court of Love, bride of the Viscount of Ventadorn, beloved of the sweetest of all singers, Bernard.

The room was heated by a brazier, which glowed evilly in the dusk; and wrapped like a nun in sad garments, lay Adelaide. A missal curiously wrought was by her side, and the flambeau caught in its socket above her couch gave her light for reading. At the foot of her cot, raised delicately on a quivering bar was a Crucifix, very featly fashioned. Desirée Autafort and Blanchefleur Vaquerias sat apart from each other there in the glooming chamber, and wrapped their young bodies close in garments of heavy silk. And near the couch of Adelaide was the old Countess of Provence. A tender smile sat on her face, and there was a look of courage about her mouth and her brow.

"I remember when I came to Ventadorn," said Adelaide, with gentle reminiscence. "The castle looked most grim. It was such a different matter from our

château. There we were always gay. When first I saw the implacability of this Hold, I shuddered, if thou wilt believe me, dear Countess. I should have despaired I think, if I had not presently been led past all those strange, grand, dark rooms to the kindlier side of the castle. There, as thou knowest, it smiled upon the long Plaisance, the avenue of clipped limes, the bewitching Lake of Lilies, made for a Countess of Ventadorn long since dead."

She ceased a little, and the wind hushing, merely crooned like a sad mother.

"Then I came to love the fruitful meadows, where apples and grapes throve. I loved the olive groves, the presses for the oil and wine. I loved the great flocks, the herds, the horses. I loved to watch the weavers and the spinners; the tilling of the ground — all the good business of the people. I am as curious as a little child, dear Countess. Not many know all the ways of this old castle. But I do; I know

them all. I could teach Ventadorn fifty secrets of his house, were he inclined to know them. There's not a room of all this wandering, terrible place, not a dungeon, not a cellar, not a passage-way but it hath been traversed by me. It passed the time, thou seest. It passed the time."

A servant entered with a steaming pitcher, and Desirée lifted the head of Adelaide and gave her the mulled wine.

"Drink ye too, my dear ones," smiled Adelaide. "Let us be as merry as we can. I have always been debonnaire, I hope. When I was little and could not guess what life might lie before me, I said to myself I should be debonnaire. It is a woman's form of courage — eh, my little ones?"

"Yes, yes," assented Desirée and Blanchefleur.

"And women have need of such courage, have they not, dear Countess? Fear and idleness — these are the things they must avoid. My mother taught me to

keep myself employed. She said business was balm for world's-woe. She taught me how to distill perfumes and lotions and herbs and flowers; how to make music on the instruments; how to embroider and to spin; how to dance and how to dream.

"'Women have need of all these things to comfort them,' she said. 'Also let them study the stars, the earth, the trees, animals, what poets have writ, what the wise have said. Whatever sorrow the heart hath — and women may not escape it — in these things lies compensation.' So my mother said, and she thought much alone, and had learned wisdom."

The blind old Countess nodded but did not speak.

"Ah, how all that she had taught me came back to me the day of my betrothal! My father told me I was sought by Ventadorn. 'He is old,' whispered my nurse. My mother cried mercy for me — but of what avail are the words of a woman?

That night we wept in each other's arms, and I rested on her breast like a little child. Then at dawn she heartened me. 'Do as they bid — these men,' she said. 'Thou art beautiful and court will be paid thee, and after a fashion thou shalt have thy revenge. But keep thou thy soul to thyself. Thou art lettered and hast delight in fantasy, and this likewise will give thee a certain power. And hark you daughter, in discourse reveal thy wit, but not thy heart; for, secretly if not openly, the men have contempt for us. They count us adorable, perhaps; miraculous like the Virgin, but not like *them*, not their equals. They sell us, buy us, beat us, kill us as they please. No one gainsays them. We are their wives. We belong to them. Therefore I say keep thy soul free, and thy sufferings will be less.' So I went to my marriage. I rode here in splendor. I found myself lady of this vast estate. But I knew not in this splendor that I should find sustenance for my soul."

"Thou art talking too much, dearest lady," said Blanchefleur. "Let Desirée sing to thee."

So Desirée sang softly, and the song of her singing was the penitential lay writ by William of Poitiers:

"My life I gave to joy and might,
But now to both I say good-night.
To Him I go, for my release,
Who gives to every sinner peace.

"Charming and gay the mien I bore,
The Lord now wills it so no more;
The weight I can no longer bear,
I have approached the end so near.

"I leave all things most dear to me,
All worldly pride and chivalry;
Whate'er God wills, that I embrace,
And pray that he will show me grace."

Minor and haunting was the strain, and when it had ceased, still her wandering fingers strayed among the mournful strings, and the wind, teachable, elfish, caught the strain and echoed it, till faint, mocking, melodious cries sounded all about the tower.

"I remember well the day that thou

foretoldst to William the Sinner, dear Countess, that he should sing this penitential chant. It was the last perfect day of our Court of Love—the golden, cloudless day. After that, I remember me, the lightness was gone."

The old Countess fingered her great yellow pearls and answered not a word.

"Thou thoughtst I loved Bernard," cried Adelaide, with sudden, affectionate reproach. "Doth one love a bird in the tree? Doth one love a little sun-flushed cloud in the sky? Yet for his melody I loved him; for his fairness I had joy of him. Starving, one takes whatever morsel offers, and if there be a dainty at hand! Well, well, thou comprehendst! You are all women. Now he is gone—long since. The other day there came to my hearing a song he writ in honor of Eleanor the Beautiful. Lend me thy lyre, Desirée, and let me see if I may sing once more."

They propped her up and gave her the little golden instrument, and with a pas-

sion of pathos she sang the song which her sometime lover had made to a woman fairer than herself:

"When I behold on eager wing
The skylark soaring to the sun,
Till e'en with rapture faltering
He sinks in glad oblivion,
Alas, how fain to seek were I
The same ecstatic fate of fire!
Yea, of a truth I know not why
My heart melts not with its desire.

"Methought that I knew everything
Of love. Alas, my lore was none!
For helpless now my praise I bring
To one who still that praise doth shun,
One who hath robbed me utterly
Of soul, of self, of life entire,
So that my heart can only cry
For that it ever shall require.

"For ne'er have I of self been king,
Since that first hour, so long agone,
When to thine eyes bewildering,
As to a mirror, I was drawn.
Then let me gaze until I die;
So doth my soul of sighing tire,
As in the fount, in days gone by,
The fair Narcissus did expire."

They took the instrument from her, and laid her back among the pillows.

"It is a fairer song than ever he sang to me," she said and smiled.

And now the old blind Countess was mumbling and muttering; and listening the women caught shadows of sentences, vague shapes of ideas, as one beholds moving phantoms, half-formed, in the beryl stone. Mumbling with the wind the same word over and over, muttering with the rain that washed the pane, they caught her phrases only in part.

"World's woe," she said, "world's woe! I am blind now, but in my day I have seen what I have seen. The monks in their cells, who call women evil; the knights and lords, who think them base; the poets, talking foolishly to them; — what do any of these know? It is the women who learn — for Sorrow is their teacher. It is the women who know — for it is Pain who instructeth them. The men have sung to us, and fought for us, they have decked us out in jewels, they have made a brave showing for us in our

bridal processions, and slain those who desired us unlawfully. But have they spoken to us with frank speech? Have they known the pain we bore; the sorrow we pressed to our bosoms; the longing that teased us, and would not let us rest — the longing for Light? Oh, it is not I who am blind — I, who have no eyes. They are blind, who having eyes, can not behold. For surely in the East the Dawn breaks! Amber and white and silver like seraphim wings!"

And Adelaide, understanding the symbol, murmured: "The Dawn breaks!"

But those watching through the bitter night saw no such dawn. Only after a time, over the darkling hills, came a wan light and spread till all the earth was ghost-pale with the glow of it. The wind sank. The rain ceased. The noises of the castle crept up the stair. Desirée rested her cheek on her fair arm and slept. Blanchefleur told her beads, for she knew a soul was passing. And the old Countess

of Provence muttered as she drowsed: "The Sorrow of Women! Heart's woe! Heart's woe!"

And now behold, here is the lament written by Raoul de Coucy, saddest of his house, wanderer, beggar, Troubadour, he of the true heart, who, loving utterly, spoke nothing of his love; and being bereft, sang this song:

"Of all the wretched I am he who bears
Most grevious pain and anguish of the mind.
I long to die, and I would deem him kind
Who slew me, for my spirit so despairs:
My life is naught but misery and dread
Since Lady Adelaide, alas! is dead:
I suffer from the injury and dole.
O traitorous Death! you can most truly say,
A better in the world you could not slay.

"Ah, it had been a blessed thing
If God had willed that I should first have died.
Wretched, alas! I would not long abide,
Now she is gone. Pardon her, Jesus, King,
Almighty God of justice and of truth;
Save her, O Christ, by thy exceeding ruth!
St. Peter and St. John receive her soul!
For in it dwell all virtues men can see,
And from all trace of evil it is free.

"We may be sure the happy angels raise

A song of joy on knowing she is dead,
For I have heard, and in the books 't is read:
'God praises one whom all the people praise.'
Whence I am sure she 's in the palace fair,
Amongst the lilies and the roses, where
The angels praise her joyously in song.
So should, indeed, the one who never lies
Seat her above the rest in Paradise.

"Ah, since my Lady Adelaide has died,
What ills I bear! For I must lay aside
All joy, and say to song my last good-bye.
Sighing and weeping henceforth is my part,
And sad complaint and anguish of the heart."

Here endeth "Castle, Knight and Troubadour," as written by Elia W. Peattie; the frontispiece was drawn by Harry Everett Townsend; and the whole made into this book and sold by The Blue Sky Press, at 4732 Kenwood Avenue, in Chicago. Of this first edition there were printed one hundred and seventy-five copies on paper and twenty-five copies on Japan vellum, this being number 136.

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